

February 19, 2007

In regards to: SB 417 Specialty Hospital Bill Hearing

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Public Health Welfare and Safety Committee,

I am here to testify in opposition to the Senate Bill 417 on Specialty Hospitals. We, at Central Montana Hospital, a general hospital, exist for two simple reasons. 1) We desire to provide the highest quality of care to our patients. 2) To provide a choice to our patients for inpatient services. Our goal is to provide an environment that is conducive to healing for our patients and their families. We aim to care for any patient who chooses our facility and that we have the appropriate services available to provide them with the best possible quality of care.

As we all know, the Great Falls Clinic in partnership with Essentia Health purchased the existing hospital 11 months ago. We purchased exactly 20 beds. There were no internal departments, support systems, or readily available medical services. In the pursuing 6 months we met with many roadblocks: licensure issues resulting in lawsuits, appeals to the Supreme Court, economic credentialing, exclusive insurance contracting, and difficulty in recruitment of professional staff. In spite of it all, we have persevered with the sole focus on our patients. In the past few months, we have made large capital investments in the interest of having more services available to our patients. We have grown from servicing dental and podiatry patients to providing services in urology, gynecology, plastics, orthopedics, ENT, general surgery to include laparoscopic procedures and open abdominal cases, as well as provided urgent services well into the evening and on weekends as necessary to meet the needs of our patients. In the area of providing medical services we have grown from zero to 32% of our discharges in a few short months. We currently provide medical services to patients with diagnoses such as congestive heart failure, deep vein thrombosis, cellulites, pulmonary embolism, urinary tract infections, but to name a few. All with only 10 beds open.

As I stand before you today we have persevered by staying focused on the needs of our patients and not losing sight of our goals. This bill is yet another roadblock in our journey to be a physician led organization providing an environment that is conducive to healing for our patients and their families. We, at Central Montana Hospital, feel this bill in part was written specifically to prohibit our organization from attaining our goals. Even though we already provide many services outside of the scope of a specialty hospital, it would be detrimental to our patients to have to constantly be aware of a quota to maintain our viable existence as a general hospital; and, one that would be classified outside of the realm of the definition of a specialty hospital that this bill creates. This bill also clearly states that since we are currently licensed as a general hospital, we would never be able to obtain a specialty hospital license. I reference Section 4: "This act may not be interpreted to allow a health care facility presenting licensed by the DPHHS and already in existence to change its licensure status so as to qualify for licensure as a specialty hospital". If that is not putting a gun to our heads to maintain a quota of certain patients and thus forcing us to choose certain patients to care for over others regardless of their choices, I do not know what is.

We, at Central Montana Hospital, are still in our infancy of developing a hospital with additional services and internal departments. It has only been 4 months since we have received word from the Supreme Court and we have increased our overall inpatient volume by 50%. As recent as a few days ago, there was an editorial published in the TRIBUNE from one of our patients. I partially quote "...it was a most positive experience from first contact to discharge....I observed the staff's efforts with several patients and their families combine smoothly to make us feel not just a patient, but a guest. We are fortunate to have access locally to excellent medical care, and Central Montana (Surgical) Hospital is one of these exemplary facilities....." This is why we exist, why we persevere, and why we stand before you today – on behalf of our patients.

I ask you to oppose this bill so that we may continue on our quest to provide the best possible care to our patients without the roadblock of shifting our focus to maintain quotas instead of increasing services so that we can provide care to a greater array of patients within our community.

I, Jane Drolet, also personally invite every one of you to tour our facility and envision your family member having the choice to be on the receiving end of our quality care.

Respectfully submitted,

Jane Drolet
Administrator
Central Montana Hospital
1509 29th Street South
Great Falls, MT 59405
406-727-5577